

The Spirit Of The Pharisees

By Bill Denton

Introduction

- A. All month long we've considered the Pharisees
 - 1. We really need to remember the good things about Pharisees because if we don't, we will miss the impact of the negative things
 - a. They were patriots who stood up for their nation, fought against their enemies, and even gave their lives for Israel
 - b. They were educators who refused to allow their fellow Jews to become ignorant of God's law
 - c. They were serious students of the Scriptures
 - d. They were determined to keep the law of Moses as well as possible
 - 2. If you don't understand these things, you cannot truly appreciate the Pharisees and what they stood for
 - a. You will also miss the seriousness of what happened to them
 - b. We need to question how such a people became the enemies of Jesus
- B. I have tried to give you some background and a brief look at their conflict with Jesus
 - 1. They had become so steeped in their traditions that they could not see where they had gotten off track
 - 2. Essentially, their words took the place of God's words
 - 3. Their traditions became more important than God's will
 - 4. They thought that their words and traditions helped them do God's will, but they were wrong
 - 5. Jesus confronted them repeatedly over the fact that they set aside the Scriptures for the sake of their traditions
- C. In our studies, we sometimes find fault with Pharisees without realizing how much we are like them
 - 1. I think we ought to be aware that sermons like these are not just about Pharisees, but they are about us as well
 - 2. It's good to learn some things about Pharisees, but the real goal is to learn some things about ourselves
- D. Matthew 5:13-20
 - 1. 13“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. 17“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19“Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the

kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. NASB95

2. Look at verses 19 and 20
 - a. Jesus' concern was with people who annul even the least of God's commands
 - b. He was concerned about teaching others to annul God's commands
 - c. Whatever he meant by surpassing the righteousness of scribes and Pharisees, it flows out of what they did to God's word
 - d. You would think this would be a fairly easy problem to prevent or correct, but the truth is that it is very hard to avoid or repair this problem

- E. Today, I mostly want to share some personal experiences with you
 1. You may or may not see the connection, but I think you'll understand that what is crystal clear to one person isn't always clear to another
 2. I want to encourage you to study the Scriptures and learn how to apply them to your life, but I want you to be very careful about demanding things of others before they have had the opportunity to do the same study

I. A Few Scriptures To Keep In Mind

- A. It's always good to keep at least a few basics in mind
 1. It is with some degree of fear and trepidation I launch this discussion today
 2. I understand that it's likely one or more of my personal illustrations will touch on one of your closely held beliefs or traditions
 3. So let's all respect the teaching of the Scriptures as we deal with these issues, so that we won't become modern day Pharisees

B. Let's keep these in mind too

1. Luke 12:1 . . . He began saying to His disciples first of all, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. NASB95
2. Luke 16:14-15 14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. 15 And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. NASB95
3. Matthew 15:1-9 1 Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 “Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” 3 And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 “For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.’ 5 “But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,” 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 9 ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ ” NASB95

4. Matthew 5:43-48 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. NASB95
5. Matthew 6:1 1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. NASB95
6. Matthew 22:34-40 34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." NASB95
7. John 13:34-35 34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." NASB95

- C. Of course those are not the only Scriptures we need to observe, but these are enough to point us away from the mistakes of the Pharisees and toward that which Jesus wanted his disciples to practice

II. Some Personal Experiences To Note

- A. Example of church in Misawa, Japan wanting to make a contribution to the "Far East Fellowship" but opposed by one who said we couldn't use money from the church treasury to assist another church
- B. Example of conversation with a man who said the church should not even allow a non-Christian to use the telephone in the church building to call an ambulance if an auto accident occurred in front of the building
- C. Example of a church where men without coats and ties were not allowed to serve communion
- D. Example of someone who complained that an "invitation" was not properly offered at the end of the sermon because they felt that we ought to preach like the apostles did (find an "invitation")
- E. Conversation in which someone complained that they were distracted by the way we observed the Lord's supper: taking it together and singing during the supper

- F. In every one of these examples, somebody thought that the Scriptures were being ignored or disobeyed
1. The tradition or practice long observed is assumed to be the only way something could be done, and to do otherwise was to break the Scriptures, not the tradition
 2. One person's opinion, or traditional practice, was bound on others as the only way to do something
 3. Human reasoning, deductions drawn, and long-held practices were equated with the actual statements of God
 4. Nobody set out to oppose God, but we get awfully close to the exact problem of the Pharisees
 5. Like the Pharisees could not see the problem, sometimes neither can we see the problem

Conclusion

- A. Let's remember that Pharisees had many admirable traits
1. They wanted, more than anything else, to be obedient to God
 2. But they ended up where they never wanted to be - enemies of God, having substituted their own words for God's words, and their own traditions for God's ways
 3. In many ways, Pharisees were a "back to the Bible" people every much as we are
 4. This is why we must pay attention to their mistakes, and be aware that the same things can happen to us
- B. Someone may say, "But this makes it all so hard"
1. Maybe it does, but we must watch the tendency to get comfortable in our traditions, always questioning the other guy but never ourselves
 2. It is worth the effort to distinguish between God's words and our own; between God's ways and our own
- C. Invitation